Mental Ability - 1928.

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Keeping Mentally Fit

By Joseph Jastrow, A. B., A. M., Ph. D., LL. D.

Occupied the chair of psychology, University of Wisconsin, 1888 to 1927; now professor emeritus; lecturer in the New School for Social Research, New York City; past president of the American Psychological Association.

MIND OF WHITE, INDIAN AND NEGRO.

THE land of the melting pot is also a racial laboratory, and psychologists are taking advantage of it. For six or seven generations before the great emancipation, Negroes were brought from West Africa to pick cotton in our South. They learned to live the white man's way. What they show is that men are pretty much the same under the skin and in their brains.

Think of the kind of life that the one generation led in Africa, their beliefs and customs, their tools and dwellings their occupations and contacts, and think of the next generation speaking, acting, living, thinking in a wholly different manner. It shows that the African mind is intelligent enough to live according to the American pattern, though that pattern is the inheritance from many generations of Western European civilization. For in any such comparison we must compare the Negro with the white man of the same opportunities, not with the selected, educated white man.

And then there is the Indian, the only true American, who has been crowded out except in so far as he has adopted the white man's habits. The Indians are still here in their descendants.

Prof. Garth, in Texas, has tested children of the three strains, white, Indian and Negro, in school work, and especially for the one quality of endurance. He kept the younger children at adding numbers for nearly half an hour and the older children for nearly three-quarters of an hour; to see whether they would get tired, get out of mental breath and show it in their work.

We know that Indian runners have great endurance, and that one of them won in a 400-mile race, a tremendous marathon of endurance The advantage is in favor of the Indians and decidedly against the Negro.

The same held fine in Prof. Garth's experiment, whether you judge by the ground covered or the number of mistakes made. Now that is only a little test, and it doesn't mean that Indians have greater endurance than whites in all things, though the results are so marked it is pretty certain that the Negro children are distinctly behind. The same was shown of the general mental ability of Negroes as compared with white enlisted men in the war.

So there are differences of mental ability of race, but they are not as marked as they would seem to be, if we went by the success of positions that Negroes and Indians occupy in the country at large. For training and opportunity count very heavily, and always in a complex kind of living such as ours, small differences count.

As nature made Negro, Indian and white, they are not very different in ability in terms of the average specimen of each placed under the same situation. But the kind of differences that count in our kind of civilization need to be measured by a finer yardstick. Yet we must never forget that a race situated as is the Negro, doesn't have the same chances, the same expectation and stimulation to do its best, as obtains among the whites who are the ruling class.

For the rest, the races of the so-called melting pot, emigrants from Europe are, in this big view, so mixed with our ruling strain that we have to be much more careful in regarding their differences in mental habit as being due to race. Presumably it is almost all due to training, though not quite all. In the case of the Chinese, we see again that a race which for generations worked according to one pattern of living could, when they put their minds to it, take up a very different pattern and do it well. The Chinese mind showed itself promptly equal to Western habits of thought when they decided to compete in our world. They learned to play our kind of game as well as their kind. All of which should make us tolerant of differences of race, and yet ready to recognize and utilize such differences as are the gifts of nature.

LEDGER
NEWARK, N. J.
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A Doctor Proves Nothing

A SERIES OF MENTAL TESTS of Negroes, whites and mixed bloods was made recently by Dr. C. B. Davenport of the Department of Genetics, Carnegie Institute, Washington. The result was reported at the sessions of the National Academy of Sciences held at Schenectady Nov. 21. Dr. Davenport concluded: "We are driven to the conclusion that there is a constitutional, hereditary, genetical basis for the differences between the two races in mental tests."

ACCORDING TO THE DOCTOR'S REPORT individuals of the two races of the same social and intellectual levels were given tests for mental aptitude in a number of different fields. The whites showed a very definite superiority in sizing up situations and reasoning them out. In memory tests, which required less thought, the Negroes were superior. In the music test the whites were superior in a sense of harmony, but in the more elementary matters of pitch and rhythm the Negroes were more acute.

A MAN CAN REACH any conclusion and prove anything if he is allowed to choose his own premises. "The moon will turn to butter if you churn it" is a perfectly logical conclusion if everyone accepts the premise that the moon is made of milk. For three hundred years the slaveholders did everything they could to kill the Negro's combining and reasoning power. Dr. Davenport leaves this entirely out of consideration, and starts with the premise that the two races had equal opportunities for developing their reasoning power. Then, because the people in his tests show a difference in reasoning, he concludes that this difference is natural.

SCIENCE IS VERY IMPRESSIVE—when it is science. Scholars do wonderful work in astronomy, geology, chemistry and other fields because they have nothing in mind but science. But when they enter the field of anthropology, the study of mankind, they are apt to lose their impartial viewpoint and debase science to the uses of propaganda. In America especially, instead of trying to find out the real truth about races, they try to discover something that will prove one race superior to another. It is very significant that in all their studies, researches and excavations they never discover anything creditable to the Negro. Dr. Davenport's laborious investigation proves exactly nothing.